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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[9 March 1994]

"YOUTH CULTURE": SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND DRUGS:

A television satellite and video-conferencing programme

1. The need to create and promote a pragmatic approach toward a fuller comprehension of human rights - in a form that is easily communicable and comprehensible - has increased, as more and more people and groups seek to know about their inherent rights and fundamental freedoms. The increasing necessity to devise an effective system to monitor the effective implementation and fulfilment of the International Bill of Human Rights, other treaty obligations and an ever-widening range of data is becoming more and more complex.

2. This is especially true of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Young people must know of their rights and of the ways to protect them. Increasingly, young people must become the chief actors in the defence of their rights by acting together in efforts to promote social progress.

3. Throughout the world, there is a growing "youth culture" with its own style of life, of communication and values. It is a "youth culture" which is often different from that of the parents, and inter-generational communication is often difficult. Therefore, it is important that youth be able to communicate with youth across national frontiers to deal with common problems.

4. Among the challenges which youth face today is the wide use of narcotic drugs. Drugs are more available than ever before. Moreover, youth may turn to drugs to rebel against problems they feel are created by adults.

5. There are many factors about the use of narcotic drugs which are universal. However, there are also many individual differences in each community. Research and experience has shown that there are no universal solutions to the problems related to substance abuse, but that many communities and small groups in individual communities have generated highly effective ways to deal with both prevention of substance abuse and intervention for youth who are substance abusers. Therefore, to be effective, a programme must be community-generated and community-based, as it is in the communities where the problem arose in the first place.

6. Youth needs to be empowered at the community level. They need to be given the opportunity to discuss their problems and to generate actively their own solutions. Youth wants and requires to be in control of this process of communication and action.

7. There is a role, however, for adults in this process as facilitators for meetings and as partners in follow-up action. The drug trade and drug abuse is not primarily a problem of youth. The trade in narcotic drugs is a problem of the total society and needs a response of the total society. Adults must learn to hear what youth has to say and to learn to understand what youth believes has influence on their own lives.

8. Youth are participant-observers of the local community and are often well aware of the abuse of narcotic drugs. Their views on what drugs are being used - and how extensively - merit our full attention.

9. Youth also has ideas on how easily drugs can be obtained and at what cost. They sometimes have knowledge as to whom the drug dealers are and if youth is being used to sell drugs to others. Likewise, they will have their views on what can be done about drug use.

10. In addition to getting a clearer picture from youth of the situation in the local community, it is important to understand the conceptions of youth regarding the motives for drug use: What are the main problems that youth are facing which are seen as causes of drug use in their homes, schools and communities? In what way are the problems facing youth today dealt with differently than they were when their parents were young? Are there different situations for girls and boys in terms of the use of drugs?

11. Communicating and sharing with others at an early stage is critical if a realistic picture of drug use at the community level is to be formulated.

12. It can be helpful to use modern media techniques to facilitate the discussion of these questions. Television and video-cassettes are known in most parts of the world and often play an important role in the "youth culture". Thus the use of television and video-cassettes with competent discussions guides can facilitate open and free discussion.

13. While it is important to focus on the local community where youth have experience and knowledge, it is also useful to show that drug abuse is a world-wide problem facing youth in all cultural settings.

14. One effective project that is known to the International Fellowships of Reconciliation - combining television, satellite video-conferencing and video-cassette use - is run by the not-for-profit, Canadian-based group: "Friday's Child International".* Young people in different countries are provided with communications facilities to talk and to interact freely about the problem of drug use in their own terms, to share experiences and to propose ideas about ways of dealing with the problems.

15. It is important to combine modern technology - often admired and used worldwide by youth - with sensitive and caring follow-up discussions, so that problems can be understood in their local context; and community-based, reconciliatory, methods found to solve them.

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